

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senator Harry Reid in Las Vegas, Nevada
July 8, 2010

The President. Hello, Nevada! Hello, Vegas! *Si se puede!* Oh, it is good to be back in Vegas. This is a pretty good crowd. I know you're disappointed, but I'm not singing tonight. *[Laughter]*

Listen, I love being in Vegas again, love being in Vegas. I love this town. Maybe not as much as my staff. *[Laughter]* For some reason, every time we come here, Air Force One is a little more crowded. *[Laughter]* It's like I'm seeing people in the couches and——

Audience member. We love you, Obama!

The President. I love you back. I love you back. A couple other people I love here. I want to make mention—Congresswoman Dina Titus is in the house. There she is right there. Love Dina. Secretary of state Ross Miller is in the house; give a big round of applause to Ross, right here. One of my earliest supporters, not just here in Nevada, but anywhere in the country, State Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford is in the house. He's somewhere out here. Your wonderful speaker of the State assembly, Barbara Buckley, is here.

Give it up for Brandon, David and Mark, The Killers. These guys, by the way, for the Fourth of July performed for military families in the South Lawn, and so have just been unbelievable for us. Really nice guys; they don't look like killers, let's face it. *[Laughter]* I mean, one of them is tall, but they don't look like you'd be scared of them. *[Laughter]* But they are wonderful people, and we are grateful to them. And then how about Sarah McLachlan? She was—I met her backstage—just delightful, and a couple of beautiful daughters. And I'm always partial to daughters. *[Laughter]*

Now, despite the entertainment, despite the nice digs, despite seeing all these old friends, the main reason I'm here is because there's a guy from Searchlight, Nevada, who has been fighting on behalf of Nevada for most of his life and is now fighting for working families all across America, and that's your Senate majority leader, Harry Reid.

I have known Harry since I arrived in the Senate 5 years ago, and we have become dear friends. He is a man of principle. He is a straight shooter. He is a man of his word. He comes across as soft-spoken—you know, how he's all like, "well, you know." *[Laughter]* Even when he's in front of a big crowd, he's like, "well, you know." *[Laughter]* "Okay, okay, we're trying here, trying hard." *[Laughter]* I mean, that's just how Harry is. But anybody who knows Harry knows he is made of strong stuff. This is one tough guy. A lot of people talk tough; Harry is tough.

A lot of people in Washington forget where they came from. Harry remembers every single day. A lot of people, instead of taking the tough votes, showing leadership, making difficult decisions, they do what's politically expedient. They're not making the choices that give them the best chance of staying in Washington. That's not Harry Reid. He doesn't always do what's easy. He doesn't always do what is popular. But he always does what's right for the people of Nevada. And that's why you've got to send him back there for one more term. As Senate majority leader, he has always done what's right. You've got to send him back.

You know, Harry used to be a boxer. He likes to brag about this. [Laughter] But it's—you know, he brags in his Harry way—he's all, "Well, I used to box." [Laughter] He'll say, "You know, I wasn't the most talented guy." [Laughter] "I wasn't very fast. I wasn't big, obviously." [Laughter] "But I could take a punch. I could take a punch."

He would outlast the other guy. And that's exactly how Harry Reid has been able to orchestrate one of the most productive legislative sessions in the history of America. And that's how he's going to win this race, so he can serve the people of Nevada one more time.

He's taken his lumps. We all have. But I have no doubt that the people of Nevada will realize the quality of public servant that they have in Harry Reid, partly because he knows no matter what kind of lumps he's taking, they're nothing compared to the lumps that folks back home have been taking.

Harry comes from humble beginnings. He knows what it's like not to have a lot. He knows what it's like to see your folks scraping by and have to tell you, no, I'm sorry, we can't afford this, we can't afford that. He's been there. And so when he hears the stories of Nevadans who are losing their homes, or he hears stories of Nevadans who have lost their jobs, when he hears stories about people who are feeling desperate, who, after doing the right thing, somehow have gotten the short end of the stick, that's who he identifies with. That's who he's fighting for.

I just came from the birthplace of another Harry, a guy named Harry Truman. Harry Truman was a lot like Harry Reid. You know, in 1948, Harry Truman campaigned across this country, making the case against the do-nothing Republicans in Congress. Right?

For the last 2 years, Harry has been dealing with the do-nothing Republican leadership in the Senate, just like Harry Truman. But despite all their tactics, despite all their political maneuvering, he's just been steady, and we keep on making progress. He does not give up; he does not give in. He keeps on fighting, and he outlasts them. And he's changed the landscape of America as a consequence.

We need Harry Reid because we've taken quite a few punches as a nation. About 17 months ago, I took office after almost a decade of economic policies that gave us sluggish job growth, falling incomes, a record deficit—I want everybody to remember this—a decade of economic policies that culminated in the worst crisis since the Great Depression.

Three million Americans had lost their jobs in the last 6 months of 2008. Another 750,000 Americans lost their jobs the month I was sworn in. The month I was sworn in—the next month, it was 600,000. And these weren't just numbers. Most of you have somebody in your family who was touched by this crisis, if you weren't yourself.

And the economic policies that led to this economic disaster were pretty straightforward. Harry mentioned it: You cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires, even if they don't need them and weren't even asking for them, you cut rules and regulations for the most powerful industries—big banks on Wall Street, big oil in the Gulf—and then you cut working families loose. You tell people, you're on your own. You don't have health care? Too bad, you're on your own. Young person born into poverty, can't afford college—tough luck, you're on your own. That was their reigning philosophy. They might call it different things, the "ownership society" or laissez-faire or whatever, but this was their philosophy.

Now, I want somebody to argue that somehow this was working well for the people in Nevada.

Audience members. No!

The President. It was bad for workers, it was bad for business owners, and it was bad for this country. And that's why, with Harry Reid's help, I took a different path as President. I had a different philosophy, one that's based on how do we help ordinary families seize opportunity and use their innovation and their drive to rebuild an America that's stronger than before. That was our job. That was our task.

So we've got a different philosophy. We said we'd cut taxes for the 95 percent of working families and small-business owners who really needed help in this recession. We believe in the free market, but we also think that everybody should be following basic rules of the road, so we made sure Wall Street banks and other big corporations have to play by the same rules that small banks and small-business owners have to play with. That just makes sense. There shouldn't be two sets of rules. There shouldn't be loopholes and special tax breaks and lack of oversight. And we decided that we were going to invest in our people and in our future, in the skills and education of our workforce, in the research and clean energy technologies that will create new jobs and new industries and make sure America is competitive in the 21st century. That's our vision for America.

Now, since we had a crisis on our hands, since the financial system was melting down, since we—people couldn't get auto loans, couldn't get home loans, people weren't traveling. You remember. You remember last year. So we had to make a bunch of decisions, and we had to make them fast. And they were tough decisions, difficult decisions. Some of them weren't popular.

Audience member. It's all right.

The President. And by the way—well, I know it's all right, because you know what? Let me tell you something. As we were making these decisions, sometimes the pundits would say, boy, you know, why is he doing that, why is Harry Reid doing that? That's not going to be popular. Well, we've got poll. You know, Harry Reid and I, we've got pollsters. They let us know when things aren't going to be popular. *[Laughter]* It's not like we were surprised. *[Laughter]* But my job isn't to put my finger up to the wind and see which way the wind is blowing. That's not Harry Reid's job. That's not leadership. Our job is to focus not on the next election but on the next generation, and that's why we made those decisions.

We knew it would take us months, years to dig ourselves out of the holes that we found ourselves in. That's longer than anybody would like, but here's what I also know: An economy that last year was shrinking by 6 percent is now growing; an economy that was shredding jobs at an unbelievable pace—we've now had 6 months in a row of private sector job growth. That's because of policies that Harry Reid helped bring about. We have turned things around, and we are moving in the right direction.

Now, that's not enough. It hasn't moved as fast as I want. I'm not going to be satisfied and Harry won't be satisfied until everybody in Nevada who wants a job can find a job. We don't want to just survive; we want to thrive. We want Nevada to be on the move. We want the Las Vegas dream to be a reality for everybody. And so we understand we've got a lot of work to do.

Basically, the other party, their whole argument is based on the notion, well, it hasn't moved fast enough. Well, I agree. I'd like to see us get out of this hole sooner, but you have to understand we are heading in the right direction. And what the other side is offering is basically to go back to the same ideas that got us into this mess in the first place. That's all they're doing.

This is a choice between the policies that led us into the mess or the policies that are leading us out of the mess. This is the choice between falling backwards or moving forward. Now, I don't know about you, but Harry Reid wants to move forward. I want to move forward. I think most people in Nevada want to move forward. They don't want to go backwards. America doesn't go backwards, we go forward. That's who we are as Americans.

What the other party is counting on is that all of you don't have very good memories. [Laughter] I mean, think about it. They're not making new arguments. It's not like they're coming back and saying, you know what, we know we screwed up, and we learned from our mistakes, and we're going to do things differently this time. That's not what you're hearing. They are peddling the same stuff they've been peddling for years and years and years.

They basically—they spent a decade driving the economy into a ditch, and now they're asking for the keys back. [Laughter] And my answer is, no, you can't have the keys. You can't drive. You don't know how to drive. You drive in the wrong direction. You can't have them back. We're just getting the car out of the ditch. We can't have you drive it back in the ditch.

Harry Reid and I, we got mud on our shoes. We're—we've been pushing and shoving—car is just kind of getting out, almost on some pavement. [Laughter] Suddenly, they're all, "No, no, we want to pull into reverse." [Laughter] Run right over Harry and me. [Laughter] Get you back in the mud. That doesn't make sense.

I mean, look, Harry Reid's opponent doesn't just believe in these old, worn-out theories. On a lot of these issues, she favors an approach that's even more extreme than the Republicans we got in Washington. [Laughter] That's saying something. [Laughter] That is saying something. I mean, she wants to phase out and privatize Social Security and Medicare.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Phase out and privatize them.

Audience member. Phase her out. [Laughter]

The President. Wants to eliminate our investment in clean energy. Wants to eliminate the Federal investment in our children's educations.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Said the answer to the BP oil spill is to deregulate the oil industry.

Audience members. No!

The President. I'm not making this up. Harry, am I making this up? [Laughter] I know some of you are saying, no, she didn't really say that. [Laughter] She said it. She said that if only there were fewer rules and safeguards, then BP would have been more careful—[laughter]—about their drilling.

Some of you might have heard about the Republican Congressman who apologized to BP. I think you heard Harry mention him. This, by the way, is the guy who heads up the Energy Committee for the Republicans. We decided, let's get \$20 billion to make sure fishermen and small-business people and hotels are compensated for their loss. That makes sense. I mean, most people around the country, it doesn't matter whether you're Democrat, Republican, Independent, you'd say, well, yeah, of course that makes sense. They shouldn't be punished for somebody else's carelessness.

Well, this Congressman, he, in a hearing, apologized to BP executives, said that the fund we'd set up was "a tragedy," "a shakedown." A tragedy? You think about all those people down there who—a lot of folks down there, just like Vegas, rely on tourism. And it's much more seasonal than Vegas, so they've got basically 3, 4 months where they make money for the entire year. You talk to some fishermen—they had already—or guys who own boats who take fishermen out—they'd already bought all their supplies, bought all their gasoline, and suddenly, that's it, wiped out. That's the tragedy. It's not asking BP to do what's right and what's fair.

But Harry's opponent, she agreed with this guy. She called the compensation we're providing a "slush fund."

Audience members. Boo!

The President. To compensate fishermen and compensate shrimpers and compensate small-restaurant owners.

Now, a few hours later, her campaign puts out a memo saying, well, she didn't mean that. [*Laughter*] They said there was some, quote, "confusion." [*Laughter*] And I'm sure she meant "slush fund" in the nicest possible way. [*Laughter*]

Let me tell you, most of the Nevadans I meet—and I've spent a lot of time here; you know that. [*Laughter*] I've been seeing you. Most of the people I meet here in this State, they don't think like that. They don't subscribe to that kind of thinking. So why would you want somebody who has that philosophy representing the people of Nevada?

Audience members. No!

The President. You need somebody like Harry Reid representing you in Nevada.

My simple point is this: You have a choice in this election—and look, obviously you're here—you guys are some diehards, you guys are supporters, and you need to be energized in this election. But when you're talking to your friends and your neighbors, and they're not following politics as closely; they're not sure how things should go; they're frustrated about what's happening, and they say, ah, it doesn't make any difference. You have to remind them, it makes a difference. There is a real choice here. We know how the movie ends if the other party is in charge. [*Laughter*] You don't have to guess how they'll govern because we're still living with the damage from the last time they were governing. And they're singing from the same hymnal. They haven't changed. They want to do the same stuff.

Right after we took office, working with Harry, we passed tax cuts for over 1 million families here in Nevada, made over 400 loans to Nevada's small businesses, extended unemployment benefits to 300,000 Nevadans who'd lost their jobs. Twenty-seven thousand men and women in this State are working today because of what Harry Reid did. They're in clean energy companies, producing solar power and geothermal power and new jobs.

That's what Harry Reid fought for, but you know what, his opponent—she's got a different way of seeing things. And if we had had her way, there would be a lot of Nevada families and small businesses right now paying higher taxes. There would be a lot of small-business owners who wouldn't have received those loans to keep their doors open and make payroll. Those 27,000 jobs, they wouldn't be there today. All that clean energy work that those companies are doing wouldn't be here today. They want to take us backwards. We want to move forwards. That's the choice in this election.

You would have thought that after this financial crisis—bear with me here, because you might be scratching your head—you would think that everybody would agree that proper oversight over the financial sector would be the smart thing to do, just to prevent this from happening again. We want businesses to thrive. We want banks to thrive. But we want to make sure that they're doing sensible things. We don't want them selling crazy derivatives that nobody understands. We don't want them selling subprime mortgages with fine print that result in people losing their homes and entire communities collapsing. We don't want them overcharging people on their credit cards for hidden fees.

So we—so Harry and I and a bunch of people just tried to put together a sensible bit of reform. Now, the Republican leader in the House says, no, we can't do that; we're against that. He says having this big financial regulatory reform, that's "like killing an ant with a nuclear weapon." That's what he said. *[Laughter]* So he thinks the worst crisis since the worst—since the Great Depression, he analogized to an ant. It's like it should be a movie: "The Ant That Ate the Economy." *[Laughter]*

So all the Republicans—a whole bunch of the Republican leadership fought against Wall Street reform. There are a handful of Republicans who are supporting it, and we appreciate that. And they're pretty much the same handful that have been supporting us on just about everything, and they're good people. But Harry's opponent said she'd leave everything exactly the way it is—the status quo.

Now, I don't believe in the status quo. Harry Reid doesn't believe in the status quo. You don't believe in the status quo.

Audience members. No!

The President. So thanks to Harry's leadership, we are about to pass this landmark legislation that will end this era of irresponsibility. That's the kind of leadership that you'll have in place. That's what he's fighting for. That's why you've got to send him back for one more term.

You go through the list. Health care—now, this is an interesting example. People in Washington, they were all surprised when I said—well, I said in the campaign I was going to do health care, so, yes, we're going to do health care reform.

They said, well, no, this is hard. This is hard. You're going to use up a lot of political capital. They said the same thing to Harry: "Harry, you're going to have a tough race. You don't want to do this. This is hard." But we said we were going to do it because we had met too many families out there who, because of a preexisting condition, couldn't get insurance. We had met folks working two, three jobs, still couldn't get insurance. We'd met too many people who had hit lifetime limits, couldn't get insurance. So we said, we're going to do the right thing. And we did it, even though it was hard, because it was the right thing to do.

Now, not only do the folks in the other party say no to reform, now they say they want to repeal it, go back to the days when insurance companies could jack up your rates any time they felt like it or drop your coverage when you get sick. That's going backwards. What do you want to do?

Audience members. Forward!

The President. I want to go forward. But in order to go forward, you got to send Harry for another term as the senior Senator from Nevada.

Look, the bottom line is this: This is going to be a tough race. Harry reminds me, he's never been in an easy race. [Laughter] That's because he talks softly and he says, "well, you know"—[laughter]. "I don't like to brag about myself." [Laughter] "I'm from Searchlight." [Laughter]

So Harry is always in a tough race. He's just not a flashy guy. I mean, considering we're in Vegas, you'd think somebody could give him some tips. [Laughter] You know, spruce up the wardrobe a little bit—[laughter]—take some voice lessons. [Laughter] So he's always in a tough race. But ultimately, what you want out of your elected officials is somebody who knows your life, who remembers what it's like to struggle so that when we're making a whole bunch of decisions that continue to face us over the next several months and the next several years, that person is going to advocate for you. He's going to have you in mind when he's deciding, are we going to have an energy future that is clean and bright and creating jobs and allowing us to compete? Are we going to make sure that young people continue to get the student loans and scholarships they need so we've got the best trained workforce in the world?

Are we finally going to get our budget and our debt under control in a way that doesn't do it on the backs of working families? Let me just talk about—let me talk about this whole debt and deficit thing. This keeps me up at night. We've got serious issues with debt and debt—deficits and debt.

Now, keep in mind that we had a surplus—you remember that?—with the last Democratic President. Do you remember that? But when I walked in—this is right in the middle of this huge crisis—what had been a record surplus was suddenly a \$1.3 trillion deficit. That was when we walked in. All right?

So we said, even though we're doing all these other things, even though we're giving tax cuts, even though we have to make sure that small businesses get loans, even though we are making sure that the economy stays afloat, despite all that, let's start taking some steps that over the long term can help control the budget.

So I proposed a 3-year freeze on all Government spending outside of national security, something that was never enacted by the previous administration. And then we identified 120 Government programs that weren't working that well. So we said, let's eliminate those and consolidate and streamline and make them work. And then I—then we said, well, let's form a bipartisan fiscal commission—an idea of a Republican Senator and a Democratic Senator, the two leading experts on the budget in the Senate—let's go ahead and adopt this proposal to come up with a long-term solution on how we're going to deal with entitlements and all this stuff.

Now, here's what happens. Harry knows this; Harry remembers this. We had seven Republicans who were sponsors of this fiscal commission. They said, we've got to deal with the deficit; we've got to deal with the debt. So I say, okay, let's do it. I make an announcement. And in front of the entire country I said, I embrace this bipartisan fiscal commission idea. Let's get this legislation passed. I'll sign it into law. Next thing you know, the seven folks on the Republican side who had been cosponsors of it voted against it—[laughter]—their legislation.

Now, this is typical. So look, I don't want you guys to get bamboozled. I don't want—when these folks start running the okeedoke on you, I want you to be clear. [Laughter] When they start intoning about how "we care so much about the deficit and debt" and "we're tired of this out-of-control Government spending"—look, these are the folks who delivered to you a structural debt—deficits that broke the record, turned record surpluses into record deficits. So

this is like a lecture on sobriety from folks who had been spending money like drunken sailors. [Laughter] You don't want to put them in charge. You definitely don't want to put them behind the wheel. Given their track record, they've been weaving on the road when it comes to fiscal responsibility. That's part of the reason they drove us into the ditch. Don't give them the keys back.

You got to make sure that Harry Reid is in a position to look after you when we make these difficult debates. So here's my hope. This is going to be close election. Everybody here, I expect, will vote for Harry. That's good. Everybody here will vote for Harry. And a couple of you who won't—he—you know, because you're scouting out what we're saying—[laughter]—that's okay. That's part of politics. And then the other two of you who thought this was how you got to the slots. [Laughter] But all the rest of you, you're going to all vote for Harry Reid.

But it's not enough for you just to vote for him. I need you to work for him. I need you to knock on doors for him. I need you to make phone calls for him. Don't do it for me. Do it for you. More importantly, do it for your children and do it for your grandchildren. And do it because despite the storm clouds we've been going through, you see out in the horizon a future that's bright.

You see a future where we're no longer relying just on dirty energy and expensive energy, but clean energy. And it's creating jobs all across Nevada. We're harnessing the sun and the wind. You see a future where every child in Nevada has a world-class education, and they're getting the jobs of the future. You see a future where health care is available for every American, and we're driving the costs of health care down for every American. And you see a future where we're respected around the world. And you see a future where you can retire with dignity and respect. And you see a future where our air and water is clean. And you see a future where the 21st century is just like the 20th century—it is the American century.

And you know in your heart of hearts the only way that's going to happen is if we make sure that leaders with the integrity and honesty and the willingness to take tough decisions like Harry Reid are sent back to Washington to fight for you. I need you to work for Harry Reid. And if you do, then our future is, indeed, bright and Nevada's future is bright and Las Vegas future is bright.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:25 p.m. at the ARIA Resort & Casino. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Brandon Flowers, Mark Stoermer, David Keuning, and Ronnie Vannucci; India Ann and Taja Sood, daughters of entertainer Sarah McLachlan; Nevada senatorial candidate Sharron Angle; Rep. Joe L. Barton; Sen. Judd A. Gregg; and Sen. Kent Conrad.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Senator Harry Reid, fundraiser in Las Vegas, NV.

Locations: Las Vegas, NV.

Names: Angle, Sharron; Barton, Joe L.; Boehner, John A.; Buckley, Barbara; Clinton, William J.; Conrad, Kent; Flowers, Brandon; Gregg, Judd A.; Horsford, Steven; Keuning, David; McLachlan, Sarah; Miller, Ross; Reid, Harry; Sood, India Ann; Sood, Taja; Stoermer, Mark; Titus, Alice "Dina"; Vannucci, Ronnie.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Congressional spending restraint; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Deficit Reduction Commission; Budget, Federal : Fiscal year

2011 budget; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Career training and continuing education; Education, Department of : Funding; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Oil and gas industry, Federal regulations and oversight; Environment : Oil spills :: Cleanup and prevention efforts; Environment : Oil spills :: Corporate responsibility; Government organization and employees : Federal programs, improvement efforts; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Economic effects and recovery efforts; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Housing : Housing market :: Decline; Independence Day; Nevada : Democratic Party event; Nevada : President's visit; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Taxation : Tax relief.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000586.